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Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2333 (2016), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for a final period until 30 March 2018 and requested to be kept informed of the situation in Liberia and the implementation of the Mission's mandate. The present report provides a midterm update on major developments in the country since my predecessor's special report dated 15 November 2016 (S/2016/968).

II. Major developments

A. Political situation and related developments

2. The political landscape in Liberia was dominated by preparations for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for October 2017. Given the establishment of new political alliances and bargaining among the 22 registered political parties and coalitions, it is unlikely that any presidential candidate will achieve an absolute majority in the first round, requiring a second electoral round in November.

3. On 29 December 2016, the National Elections Commission certified the first opposition alliance, the Coalition for Democratic Change, comprising the Congress for Democratic Change, led by former presidential candidate and current Senator of Montserrado County, George Weah; the National Patriotic Party, led by former First Lady and current Senator of Bong County, Jewel Howard Taylor; and the Liberia People's Democratic Party, led by the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alex Tyler. On 21 January 2017, the coalition named Mr. Weah as its standard-bearer and Ms. Taylor as its vice standard-bearer. Following allegations in the media that the former President, Charles Taylor, had influenced the formation of the new coalition, on 16 March, Mr. Weah reportedly admitted to holding a telephone conversation with Mr. Taylor, who is serving a 50-year sentence after having been found guilty by the Special Court for Sierra Leone of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Sierra Leone.

4. On 23 January, the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, presented her final annual state of the nation address, identifying the fight against corruption and national reconciliation as priorities for the remainder of her tenure. The President

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also called for the passage of land rights and local government legislation and for the holding of a national forum with political stakeholders to agree on peaceful elections in October 2017 and the subsequent transition to a new Government in 2018.

5. On 3 March, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials and Government Employees, which contains provisions requiring that all persons appointed by the President wishing to seek elective office resign two years, or three years for tenured appointees, prior to standing for election. As a consequence, prominent persons wishing to seek office could be disqualified, while current officials engaged in political activities, such as serving on campaign teams, or using government resources to support partisan or political activities could also be affected. There remains a lack of consensus among political parties on the applicability of the Code of Conduct.

6. On 14 March, the President issued Executive Order No. 83, operationalizing the Office of the Ombudsman, which is tasked with overseeing implementation of the Code of Conduct. On 3 April, the President nominated the former Inspector General of Police, Chris Massaquoi, as Chair, in addition to two members, one of whom had to be replaced for not meeting the age criteria. The nominees still await Senate confirmation.

7. In March, allegations emerged in the media that the Chair of the National Elections Commission, Jerome Korkoya, holds citizenship in the United States of America, which is unconstitutional in Liberia. Reactions have been mixed. Some legislators called on Mr. Korkoya to explain allegations of lying under oath during his confirmation hearings, and some political parties called for an adjudication of the matter in court. Mr. Korkoya denied the allegations and called upon his accusers to provide evidence. On 12 May, Mr. Korkoya was sued by a group of citizens and an unregistered political party, alleging a violation of the Aliens and Nationality Law. Several presidential candidates also allegedly hold dual citizenship and could face similar challenges.

8. On 30 May, a group of opposition political parties formally presented to the National Elections Commission a document entitled "the Ganta Resolution", committing to peaceful elections in 2017. The parties had adopted the resolution in September 2016. Additionally, on 31 May and 1 June, the Government of Liberia, supported by UNMIL, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), hosted a national forum facilitated by the Interreligous Council of Liberia, which culminated in the signing of the "Farmington River Declaration" on 4 June by standard-bearers and political leaders of 20 out of 22 registered political parties declaring their commitment to a peaceful electoral process and the transfer of power to a new administration in January 2018.

9. The Governance Commission began work on a bill proposing arrangements for the transition from the current to the next Government, with provisions for regulating the process. Meanwhile, the General Service Agency has started to document and verify all government assets to ensure accountability during the transition.

Electoral process

10. From 1 February to 14 March, the National Elections Commission conducted a nationwide voter registration exercise, which was judged credible by national and international observers despite initial technical glitches that resulted in a one-week extension of the process. On 31 March, the Commission announced the provisional results of the voter registration, which recorded 2.1 million voters, of whom approximately 48 per cent are women. The provisional voter roll should be

exhibited from 12 to 17 June, pending the timely release of funds by the Government.

11. On 9 May, the National Elections Commission issued a writ of elections, indicating that the elections would be held on 10 October 2017. The last day for the nomination of candidates by registered political parties and applications by independent candidates is 11 July. The official campaign period will be from 31 July to 8 October. In preparation for the effective adjudication of election-related disputes, a retreat for judges took place in May, during which the elections law, particularly amendments made in 2014, was discussed.

12. A number of efforts were undertaken to encourage full participation in the democratic process. On 14 February, a women's situation room opened in Monrovia to receive complaints of election-related violence and support the voter registration process. As part of the efforts to enhance women's participation in politics and governance, UNMIL quick-impact projects facilitated training to further empower 100 female political aspirants and campaign managers engaged in grass-roots advocacy. Additionally, in March and April, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a series of stakeholder consultations on youth engagement, bringing together representatives from women and youth organizations, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Elections Commission and the United Nations to discuss prevention of election-related violence, including gender-based electoral violence; increasing trust and cooperation between youth and security providers; and raising awareness of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015). On the basis of those consultations, UNDP developed a project on enhancing youth participation in the 2017 electoral processes, which received $1.8 million in support from the Peacebuilding Fund.

13. In accordance with his good offices and political support mandate, my Special Representative routinely engaged with political stakeholders, encouraging interaction through the Inter-Party Consultative Committee. Additionally, UNMIL, in close collaboration with the Press Union of Liberia, media managers and other partners, worked to encourage incisive yet responsible election-related journalism. The Mission also conducted civic awareness initiatives aimed at preventing electoral violence and enhancing reconciliation, and has provided support for voter education initiatives using various platforms, including radio, roadshows and social media. The Commission also receives support through a UNDP project and a donor-funded basket fund.

14. From 10 to 12 May, my Special Representative consulted with senior government officials in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone in support of national efforts aimed at facilitating an environment conducive to peaceful elections in Liberia. All interlocutors welcomed the spirit of good neighbourliness prevailing among the Mano River Union countries and affirmed their commitment to supporting Liberia during the electoral process. Additionally, the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS have agreed to coordinate closely with respect to messaging throughout the political period and beyond. To enhance the prospect of a free and fair electoral process, several international partners, including the African Union and ECOWAS, plan to deploy election observers to complement national observers.

15. During the reporting period, UNMIL trained 655 senior Liberia National Police officers, including 163 women, in command, control and communications, as well as crisis and incident management. This will support the police's elections operations centre at their headquarters in Monrovia, as well as three regional operations centres. In January, the national police established an election security task force, comprising law enforcement and security agencies, which will engage at

the ministerial and donor levels to conduct joint assessments of security risks and undertake operational planning. UNMIL provides support and strategic guidance to the task force. Additionally, 555 police officers, including 179 women, were trained in community policing and election security. To build public confidence, the national police leadership regularly visited different counties to engage with community stakeholders and held a session in Monrovia with political party representatives on ensuring peaceful campaigns.

National reconciliation, political reforms and governance

16. The Government, with UNMIL support, continued its efforts to advance non-judicial recommendations presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009. In December 2016 and January 2017, Palava Hut hearings focused on forgiveness were held in Grand Gedeh and Lofa Counties. A total of 269 war-related victim statements were recorded and 177 cases were amicably resolved. On 8 March, the President dedicated a memorial site honouring Liberians who had died during the civil war on the site of the Paynesville massacre.

17. In April, a national stakeholder review of the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation was conducted by the Liberia Peacebuilding Office, with support from UNMIL. The review revealed that the road map remained relevant and that the Government's political and financial commitment, as well as strengthened coordination among key stakeholders, would be required to achieve national reconciliation. In May, the Liberia Peacebuilding Office and UNMIL disseminated the findings of a social cohesion and reconciliation index measuring progress in advancing reconciliation, and used the results to initiate policy discussions with government officials, civil society and the international community. The index identified areas requiring urgent interventions aimed at strengthening civic trust in government institutions, reducing aggressive tendencies, including sexual and gender-based violence, and enhancing development. The Liberia Peace Ambassador, responsible for developing an agenda for lasting peace in partnership with the National Reconciliation Commission, continued efforts at improving relations between the police, commercial motorcyclists and local communities in Monrovia. He also held conflict resolution meetings in Bomi, Bong, Montserrado and Nimba Counties in April, and in Grand Gedeh, Maryland and River Gee counties in May. UNMIL supported some of these initiatives, including through its quick-impact projects. In May, the Ministry of Internal Affairs hosted peace and reconciliation dialogues for women and youth representatives, county officials and traditional chiefs in Bomi, Gbarpolu, Maryland, Nimba and Sinoe Counties.

18. In March, the President appointed the chairperson and commissioner for policy and planning of the newly established Liberia Land Authority. The President also appointed three other Land Authority commissioners; on 25 May, the Senate confirmed one, while others are still pending. Although land has been identified as a major conflict trigger in Liberia, the land rights bill, recognizing customary land rights, has yet to be enacted. In December, the Legislature decided to hold further consultations with constituents to enhance citizen support and national ownership of the new law, which were initiated in May. My Special Representative, in keeping with his good offices mandate, encouraged the passage of reform legislation, including the pending local government and domestic violence bills.

19. The decentralization of public services continued, with the Government establishing county service centres that provide document-related services, such as the issuance of birth and marriage certificates and driver's licences. Service centres are operational in eight counties and are planned to be available in all 15 counties by the end of 2017.

20. Liberian authorities also undertook efforts to address disputes between communities and concessions. In March, the National Bureau of Concessions, with support from UNMIL and UNDP, launched multi-stakeholder conflict mitigation platforms in four conflict-prone concession sites, specifically Golden Veroleum in Sinoe County; ArcelorMittal in Nimba County; Maryland Oil Palm Plantation/ Cavalla Rubber Corporation in Maryland County; and Sime Darby in Grand Cape Mount County. The platforms, which are funded through assessed contributions, are aimed at establishing sustainable local mechanisms for managing disputes between concession companies and local communities.

21. In November 2016, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission lost a high-profile case relating to the misappropriation of $5.7 million from the sale of 15,000 tons of petroleum products valued at $13 million, which had been donated by the Government of Japan. A former minister of commerce and a former managing director of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company were among those indicted for economic sabotage, misapplication of entrusted property, criminal conspiracy and violation of public procurement procedures and processes. However, the Ministry of Justice advised the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission not to proceed with the cases because of insufficient evidence to secure a prosecution. Between November 2016 and 1 June 2017, 20 audit reports released by the General Auditing Commission implied fraud and/or misappropriation at ministries and other government agencies. As of May 2017, the cases of 11 individuals and 6 institutions had been sent to the Ministry of Justice for further investigation and prosecution.

22. On 22 and 23 February, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection hosted an event to review progress in implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) as part of Global Open Day for Women and Peace. Participants, including those from civil society, observed that transformative leadership could help to overcome structural challenges hindering women's participation in governance, including financial and cultural obstacles.

B. Security situation

23. The security situation remained generally stable, although there were sporadic incidents such as armed robberies, burglaries, presumed ritual killings, land disputes, mob violence and demonstrations. The national police were unable to respond appropriately to all incidents, especially in the remote counties, owing to understaffing and a lack of resources, such as vehicles; hence not all incidents were attended to or reported.

24. Following the discovery of the body of an 18-year-old girl purportedly killed for ritual purposes in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, approximately 500 persons besieged the Liberia National Police station on 6 January, demanding that the suspect be handed over for mob justice. The national police were initially overwhelmed but were reinforced by Police Support Unit officers and contained the situation.

25. On 8 February, a land dispute between the Mandingo and Mano ethnic groups in Sokopa Town, Nimba County, resulted in the killing of one person; another person is missing and presumed dead. Residents of Sokopa Town fled into the bush for several days and only returned to their homes after intervention.

26. On 18 April, a group of Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers attacked national police officers at the police station in Paynesville, on the outskirts of Monrovia, resulting in the injury of two police officers. The police had earlier confiscated a motorcycle from a soldier for violating the curfew. No arrests were made.

27. On 29 April, unarmed forest rangers who were trying to arrest illegal miners and poachers from Sapo National Park, in Sinoe County, came under attack, resulting in the death of one ranger and injuries to five others. Six suspects were arrested.

28. On 20 May, 17 Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers assaulted civilians in Wainsue, Bong County, injuring 15 residents. Five soldiers were arrested and military investigations are ongoing.

Protection of civilians

29. UNMIL completed a review of its protection of civilians strategy in January, which prioritizes prevention through good offices and enhancement of national capacity. In February, a mapping exercise of possible threats to the protection of civilians, such as election-related human rights violations and conflicts over concessions, was completed, and throughout the period under review a series of training exercises was conducted for partners of the United Nations and national partners.

C. Regional situation

30. On 4 June, Liberia hosted the fifty-first session of the Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, during which the President of Togo, Faure Gnassingbé, was elected to succeed Ms. Johnson Sirleaf as Chair of ECOWAS. During Ms. Johnson Sirleaf's tenure, Liberia domesticated several ECOWAS protocols, including on mutual assistance in criminal matters and on establishing the ECOWAS criminal and intelligence bureau. Additionally, the region witnessed progress in the consolidation of democracy, strengthening peace and security, improving financial stability and promoting institutional reform. On regional integration, progress was made in implementing the protocols on free movement of persons and goods, particularly the Common Internal Tariff, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and the Economic Partnership Agreement.

31. The Mano River Union organized a meeting in Monrovia on the implementation of its 2013 strategy for cross-border security on 30 November and 1 December 2016. Participants from Member States, ECOWAS and UNMIL met to review achievements; identify challenges and share experiences with the joint border security and confidence-building units; and propose recommendations aimed at harmonizing border control, generating momentum for the implementation of the strategy and enhancing cross-border security cooperation.

32. Following the withdrawal of troops from the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and UNMIL formed police from the Côte d'Ivoire-Liberia border in January and February 2017, respectively, inter-mission cooperation activities were subsequently focused on supporting the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia in developing their bilateral cooperation. In May, my Special Representative engaged in consultations with Liberia's neighbouring countries on regional cooperation, including discussions on the transnational crime units and the West Africa Coast Initiative.

D. Humanitarian situation

33. Conditions in Côte d'Ivoire remained generally conducive to the voluntary return of Ivorian refugees, although the rate of return of refugees living in Liberia slowed during the first five months of 2017 compared with that of the same period

in 2016. Refugees expressed concerns about security, as well as access to land, basic services and livelihood opportunities in areas of return, in addition to scepticism about the national reconciliation and social cohesion processes in Côte d'Ivoire. To mitigate those concerns, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees organized visits by refugees to villages of return so they could assess available reintegration programmes and security conditions. As at 6 June, Liberia was hosting 15,460 registered Ivorian refugees, including 11,726 living in refugee camps and 3,734 living with host communities, down from the peak of approximately 224,000 refugees in 2011.

34. Lessons learned from the Ebola virus disease outbreak have informed the effort of the Ministry of Health to develop a more resilient health system. Thanks to the national health policy and plan, which is aimed at strengthening national capacity to detect, mitigate and respond to public health threats, there was an effective response to a meningitis outbreak that began in late March. As at 6 June, 31 persons had been infected, 13 of whom had died. The clinical and laboratory results of 13 of the 31 cases were positive for Neisseria meningitidis serotype C, leading to the conclusion that the disease was meningitis. On 17 May, an agreement was reached between the Ministry of Health and the World Bank regarding the development of capacity to diagnose tropical and other communicable diseases in the country within 48 hours of testing.

35. The Government, with support from the World Food Programme, undertook a zero hunger strategic review process that is aimed at assessing the nature of vulnerability in the country and designing a road map for eliminating hunger by 2030, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals. The report was launched by the President on 16 May.

E. Human rights

36. The human rights situation continued to be characterized by the high incidence of sexual and gender-based violence; harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, forcible initiation into secret societies, trial by ordeal and accusations of witchcraft; curtailment of the freedom of speech; and limited national capacity and resources to promote and protect human rights or to meet treaty reporting obligations.

37. Between June 2016 and March 2017, the Government reported 1,404 cases of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, of which 70 per cent of the victims were girls under 18 years of age. Following the unsuccessful attempt in 2016 to enact a domestic violence bill containing provisions criminalizing female genital mutilation, efforts are under way, as part of the National Human Rights Action Plan, to develop a new bill criminalizing the practice in accordance with the recommendations of the universal periodic review. In November 2016, the United Nations/Government of Liberia joint programme on sexual and gender-based violence entered its third implementation phase, which is scheduled to run until the end of 2020, resources permitting; $3.2 million of the required $36 million has been secured. The programme, which aims to reach all counties, will focus on changing perceptions and attitudes while strengthening systems to address rape, early marriage, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices and their interlinkages with sexual and reproductive rights, HIV and AIDS.

38. In November 2016, Liberia submitted its long-delayed treaty report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which assesses the State's record in implementing the treaty. In December, a platform for civil society organizations focusing on human rights was created, which will enhance

coordination and advocacy. In March 2017, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights was accredited to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, allowing the Commission to access resources, engage with other institutions and more effectively carry out its mandate in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles). The Commission also published a report on the conditions of prisons and prisoners in Liberia in April that underscored human rights violations experienced by prisoners, including limited medical care, overcrowding, prolonged pretrial detention, poor sanitation and inadequate nutrition. In June, the Commission finalized a manual on receiving complaints to guide case review.

F. Economic situation

39. The macroeconomic situation continued to be affected negatively by the global decline in commodity prices and the residual impact of the Ebola outbreak, as demonstrated by real gross domestic product (GDP) growth, which was 8.7 per cent in 2013, 0.7 per cent in 2014, zero in 2015 and 0.5 per cent in 2016. In March 2017, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reduced Liberia's 2016 economic growth estimate to minus 1.2 per cent from its October 2016 estimate of 0.5 per cent. The estimate for 2017 is 3.0 per cent. IMF estimates that Liberia faces a significant shortfall in revenue despite receiving nearly $75 million in direct budget support from donors for the financial year 2016/17.

40. Contraction of the fiscal space, which was also attributed to obligations linked to the security transition, resulted in a per capita decline in GDP of approximately 2.0 per cent. IMF projects economic growth of between 2.5 and 3.0 per cent for 2017/18. The fiscal out-turn for 2016/17 is estimated at $520 million, representing a 6.0 per cent decline against 2015/16. Meanwhile, the ability of Liberia to borrow is limited by the rise in its debt risk rating from "low" to "moderate" in March 2017 because of its high debt to GDP ratio.

41. Inflation remained high, rising from 7.7 per cent in December 2014 to 12.5 per cent in December 2016; inflation eased, however, to 9.9 per cent as of February 2017. The depreciation of the Liberian dollar followed the circulation of millions of new banknotes in the fourth quarter of 2016, which created uncertainty about the economy and was a factor in the decrease in the purchasing power of the Liberian dollar and the corresponding increase in the price of basic commodities.

III. Development of national security and justice capacity

A. National security strategy and architecture

42. Progress was made in developing the national security strategy and architecture. On 19 May, a revised national security strategy aimed at building peace, security, stability and development through the accountable and effective coordination of the security sector was submitted by the National Security Adviser to the members of the National Security Council for approval following a review of the 2008 strategy that has been under way since September 2016. UNMIL is providing advice on the elaboration of an implementation plan, to be completed by the end of June. In line with the statement of mutual commitments between the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government, with support from the United Nations and the World Bank, preparations began in April for a public expenditure review of the justice and security sectors, which will be conducted from May 2017

to April 2018. It will inform costing for implementing the justice and security aspects of the Agenda for Transformation, the revised national security strategy and the second phase of the peacebuilding plan conveyed to the Security Council in my letter dated 4 April 2017 (S/2017/282).

43. In April, the Ministry of Justice began a public safety reform initiative entailing a review of the legal framework regulating private security companies and the elaboration of a public safety road map. The Ministry is also drafting, with the support of UNMIL, a public safety law covering the regulation of private security companies, which will be submitted to the Office of the President by the end of June.

44. The National Commission on Small Arms developed regulations for implementing the Firearms and Ammunition Control Act and undertook a series of public sensitization activities. The draft uniform code of military justice remains pending before the Legislature. In the interim, civilian and military officials have received training on the memorandum of understanding signed between the Ministries of Justice and Defence in May 2016 seeking to enhance accountability by subjecting the armed forces to the jurisdiction of the civilian justice system.

45. As part of its efforts to build a gender-responsive security sector architecture, on 27 March, the Ministries of Justice, Defence, and Gender, Children and Social Protection, with support from UNMIL, launched a gender and security sector task force. The task force will coordinate security sector gender focal points to develop joint programmes aimed at enhancing equal participation and opportunities for men and women in the security sector. Subsequently, with UNMIL support, gender offices were established to mainstream gender in security operations in the Ministry of Justice, the Armed Forces of Liberia, the Liberia Immigration Service, the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

46. UNMIL also worked to enhance civil society engagement in the security sector reform process, including through a security sector reform think tank established in December 2016 at the University of Liberia. From 20 February to 20 April 2017, civil society organizations sensitized the population to new accountability frameworks within the sector. UNMIL also engaged with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces on designing a project aimed at enhancing the capacity of the next Legislature to provide effective oversight of the security sector; initial assessments to that end were conducted in April and May.

B. Liberia National Police

47. As at 6 June, the strength of the national police stood at 5,127 officers, including 970 women. The majority of the police service, or 3,858 officers, including 748 women, were deployed in Montserrado County as at that date, leaving only 1,284 officers deployed throughout the rest of the country. Forty-one officers are dedicated to addressing accountability, administrative and personnel matters, in support of the decentralization of policing services. In April, 15 senior officers, including five women, graduated from a leadership and management training course in Ghana.

48. The Inspector General of Police, appointed in September 2016, has prioritized leadership, management, professionalism and the delivery of services. However, gaps remain. Policy management and civilian complaints review boards required by the Liberia National Police Act of 2016 are not yet operational. Consequently, in December 2016, 244 officers were promoted in violation of the Act, which requires that the Ministry of Justice's policy management board approve all promotions. The national police, with UNMIL support, continued to sensitize officers with regard to

the Act. Meanwhile, the drafting of six administrative instructions and seven regulations to implement components of the Act was completed in March.

C. Liberia Immigration Service

49. As at 6 June, the strength of the Liberia Immigration Service stood at 2,606 personnel, including 751 women. Of those personnel, 1,914 were deployed to border areas and Roberts International Airport. In April, 15 immigration officers completed a leadership and management course in Ghana, with support from Irish Aid.

50. The Liberia Immigration Service has prioritized the development of regulations and administrative instructions to ensure effective implementation of the Immigration Act. UNMIL provided support by printing and disseminating 1,500 copies of the Act and supporting sensitization programmes for immigration officers. Although the Liberia Immigration Service made progress in drafting regulations and administrative instructions, delays in establishing the policy management and civilian complaints review boards under the immigration law hindered effective management, oversight and accountability.

51. The immigration service has adequate capacity to monitor migration and detect fraudulent travel documents. Border security mechanisms were strengthened with programmatic support provided by UNMIL in line with its mandate, and implemented together with the national police and other law enforcement agencies with border functions. Seventeen of 45 official ports of entry were provided with modern equipment to manage migration and enhance border security. During the reporting period, 140 Liberia Immigration Service officers, including 30 women, were trained in fraudulent document identification, accountability and integrity.

D. Justice and corrections

52. In April, 60 magistrates completed a one-year training course conducted by the judiciary and were subsequently deployed outside of Montserrado County to enhance access to justice.

53. Efforts intensified during the reporting period to introduce plea bargaining in order to alleviate the high level of pretrial detention. As at 1 June, 1,450 persons, or 65 per cent of the prison population, were pretrial detainees. There were nine prison escapes, owing to severe crowding, weak infrastructure and the inability of overstretched officers to ensure control, particularly at corrections facilities outside of Monrovia.

54. On 11 April, the Minister of Justice signed new standard operating procedures and a five-year strategic plan for the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation. After one year of mentoring, in March, UNMIL handed over to the Bureau prisoners' electronic data, which it had previously collected and maintained. Since assuming full responsibility for this task, the Bureau has regularly distributed relevant data to criminal justice institutions. UNMIL assisted in building the Bureau's gender responsiveness in prisons through pilot training organized by the Group of Friends of Corrections that was conducted in early December.

55. Between November and December 2016, UNMIL and the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation provided training for 60 mid-level managers, including 17 women, in incident management and operational capacities to enhance corrections management and accountability through improved internal management and oversight.

E. Armed Forces of Liberia

56. The strength of the armed forces stood at 2,000 personnel as at 6 June. The United States provides training and support for strengthening defence institutions, professional development, maritime security, engineering support and medical readiness. Through this partnership, the armed forces developed its first nationally led officer candidate school, which initiated its first course on 1 May. ECOWAS also provides mentoring for the armed forces. In March, French military instructors conducted a 10-day infantry training exercise and mentoring programme aimed at enhancing combat skills for 50 members of the Armed Forces of Liberia in Zwedru.

57. The army continued to face operational challenges owing in part to insufficient funding, which hampered its ability to sustain operations outside of Montserrado and Margibi Counties. Nonetheless, the army participated in three joint training exercises with the national police and other security agencies during the period under review.

58. The coastguard has 85 personnel and is capable of patrolling up to 150 nautical miles off the coast. On 3 February, a commercial fishing vessel was intercepted while illegally trawling in Liberian waters.

59. Liberia contributes 78 troops to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In May, a Liberian peacekeeping soldier was killed during an indirect attack on a MINUSMA camp.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia

A. Military component

60. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2333 (2016), the authorized military component of UNMIL comprised 434 personnel as at 28 February 2017, compared with the previous ceiling of 1,240 personnel. The force comprises one infantry company (230); a three-helicopter aviation unit (105 personnel); a level II hospital (69 personnel); and 15 military observers and 15 staff officers. While the force is consolidated in Monrovia, it retains a quick response capability that can deploy up to three platoons anywhere in the country, while military observers regularly conduct patrols throughout the country.

61. The quick reaction force established within UNOCI pursuant to Security Council resolution 2162 (2014) was repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire to Senegal in February, where it is being retrained and equipped prior to its deployment to MINUSMA pursuant to Council resolution 2295 (2016). An advance team of 250 troops will deploy to Mopti, Mali, by the end of July, while it is planned that the remaining 400 members, including the aviation unit, will deploy by the end of August.

B. Police component

62. The police component was reduced to 310 personnel by 28 February from a previous ceiling of 606, pursuant to resolution 2333 (2016). In line with its revised concept of operations for police, UNMIL has consolidated two formed police units in Monrovia that retain the capability to simultaneously deploy up to one platoon from each unit anywhere in the country.

63. The 50 individual police officers, also consolidated in Monrovia, undertake activities through a mobile team concept involving frequent visits to counties, jointly conducted with national counterparts where possible. Priority tasks include supporting the development of the leadership, internal management, professionalization and accountability mechanisms of the national police, with a particular focus on election security and supporting national security agencies to protect civilians in the event of a deterioration that could risk a strategic reversal of stability.

C. Civilian component

64. In the UNMIL budget submission for 2017/18, the abolition of 228 international and national civilian and United Nations Volunteer posts on 1 July 2017 is proposed, leaving 237 international, 421 national and 125 United Nations Volunteer posts as from that date. The timelines for the departure of remaining personnel will be carefully phased to correspond with the conclusion of mandated tasks, including good offices and political support, limited logistical assistance for the electoral process and the transfer of UNMIL responsibilities and assets, including UNMIL Radio, to partners. Determination of the personnel to be retained after 1 July 2017 was based on a comparative review exercise endorsed by the Secretariat that was undertaken in accordance with lessons learned from previous exercises.

D. Support considerations

65. As at 1 November 2016, the Mission operated 27 sites across the country, which have since been reduced in line with the streamlined mandate and the reduction of uniformed personnel. As from 1 July 2017, UNMIL operations will be reduced to 18 sites in Monrovia, field offices in Voinjama and Zwedru and a communications hub in Gbarnga. To continue countrywide transmission of UNMIL Radio as field offices closed, the station partnered with the Liberia Broadcasting System, primarily with shared broadcast towers and facilities.

66. Given the potentially sensitive transition from the current Government to another in January 2018, it is essential that UNMIL remain able to fully implement all aspects of its mandate until 30 March 2018. Consequently, the Mission's liquidation plan entails pre-liquidation in as many areas as possible while substantive activities are under way, with rapid liquidation to be undertaken between 1 April and 30 June 2018. UNMIL has undertaken a thorough assessment of its sites and assets to assist in achieving rapid liquidation. Assets have been grouped and some are being shipped to other peacekeeping missions. From 1 January 2018, most of the remaining UNMIL assets will be beyond their usable life, which will help to expedite asset disposal and site closures. The Mission has engaged closely with the Global Service Centre and UNOCI to ensure that relevant lessons are incorporated in liquidation planning. Additionally, two UNMIL personnel have been deployed to UNOCI to assist with its ongoing liquidation and gain valuable experience for UNMIL liquidation in 2018.

E. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

67. In furtherance of my zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, UNMIL and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection carried out an awareness-raising campaign throughout the country, encouraging community

members to report allegations and to direct victims to sexual and gender-based violence referral pathways that include options for legal, psychosocial, community or protection choices. UNMIL provided mandatory training on sexual violence and other conduct-related issues for 979 United Nations staff and related personnel, as well as 6,287 community members near United Nations premises. Ten allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, covering a period of one year, were reported during the period and are being investigated.

F. Safety and security of personnel

68. No major security incidents against United Nations personnel were recorded during the reporting period, although there were 111 road traffic accidents involving United Nations vehicles. Efforts are under way to improve road safety, including through training for UNMIL personnel in defensive driving. Three robberies, 11 burglaries, three thefts and one minor fire were recorded at the residences of United Nations personnel, while street crime targeting United Nations personnel included one armed robbery, five unarmed robberies, two thefts and four assaults. Seven United Nations personnel died during the reporting period, one in a traffic accident and six of natural causes.

69. With respect to United Nations facilities, assets and operations, 23 incidents were recorded, including four burglaries, one theft, two cases of attempted theft, seven minor fires, four peaceful protests by local actors, four intrusion-related incidents and one instance of damage caused by rain.

V. Transition of the United Nations engagement in Liberia

70. Given that the United Nations engagement in Liberia is transforming, UNMIL and the Government of Liberia are working closely together to develop clear messaging aimed at assuaging public anxiety about the Mission's closure. Those messages underscore the fact that Liberian security services have significantly increased their capacity to maintain peace, as demonstrated by their effectiveness over the 11 months since the end of the security transition. The messages also stress that the United Nations and other partners will remain engaged in Liberia after the closure of the peacekeeping operation. Information campaigns conducted throughout the country, including through UNMIL Radio, have utilized varied approaches with local actors and traditional communicators.

71. In March, UNMIL and the United Nations country team established a joint transition task force. The objectives of the task force are twofold: first, to support Liberia's political transition, specifically the transfer of political and administrative power to a new Government in January 2018; and second, to support the United Nations transition with a view to ensuring the continuation of peace consolidation priorities currently supported by UNMIL. These efforts are closely associated with those of the Governance Commission, as described in paragraph 9 above. Also, by my letter dated 4 April 2017 (S/2017/282), I transmitted to the Security Council the peacebuilding plan requested by the Council in resolution 2333 (2016) that was jointly developed by the Government of Liberia and the United Nations, in consultation with bilateral, regional and other partners, including the World Bank and the European Union, which provides a framework for sustaining peace in the context of the transitions under way in Liberia. The Government has initiated a process for developing its implementation plan.

72. A capacity mapping exercise finalized by the United Nations country team in May, which detailed the requirements for a strategy to sustain peace in Liberia,

identified considerable gaps in financial and material resources in addition to human and logistical capacities that the country team will face after UNMIL is withdrawn. Pursuant to resolution 2333 (2016), UNMIL worked closely with the country team to identify strategies for addressing its gaps in capacities, including with a view to accelerating preparations for the Mission's drawdown and closure. In that regard, identified UNMIL assets will be written off and transferred in accordance with relevant financial rules and regulations in order to support the operations of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Additionally, as recommended in the special report of the Secretary-General of 15 November 2016 (S/2016/968), the country team and the Government are supporting the implementation of tasks mandated to UNMIL, with funding from the Mission's budget. Among the areas of intervention are community policing; border management, security and stabilization; election-related dispute resolution; and combating impunity for sexual and gender-based violence.

73. UNMIL also engaged closely with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel to initiate the process of handing over relevant activities, including those related to support for the Mano River Union. In addition, UNMIL has begun discussions with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) about establishing a stand-alone OHCHR office as part of the United Nations country team after the withdrawal of UNMIL. With regard to UNMIL Radio, a range of possible options are under consideration to facilitate its sustainable transfer to an independent entity after the Mission's withdrawal, pursuant to resolution 2333 (2016). This includes its possible conversion to a regional radio station under the auspices of ECOWAS, a proposal supported by the President of Liberia.

74. Efforts are also under way to enhance engagement with regional partners. In April, my Special Representative visited Abuja to consult with ECOWAS and Nigerian officials on a range of issues, including measures to be taken jointly in order to prevent conflict during the electoral period and democratic transition, and by regional partners after the withdrawal of the peacekeeping operation. Specific possible interventions under consideration could be finalized on a bilateral basis with the Liberian authorities.

VI. Observations

75. Ensuring credible presidential and legislative elections in October 2017 and a peaceful transfer of power in January 2018 are monumental milestones that will consolidate Liberia's transformation to sustained peace and democratic order. The citizens of Liberia have played an essential role in the country's positive journey since the end of the civil war in 2003, and I wish to pay tribute to their efforts. However, sustaining peace will require the people and Government of Liberia to remain committed to nurturing that hard-won peace, throughout the electoral process and beyond.

76. I commend the stated commitment of all stakeholders to ensure that the elections in October will be free, fair and transparent and that any dispute will be resolved peacefully through established mechanisms in accordance with the law. I urge all Liberian citizens to actively participate in the electoral process in a constructive manner. I particularly welcome public commitments made by political party leaders to violence-free elections and acceptance of the electoral outcomes. I also welcome the outcome of the ECOWAS Summit of 4 June, specifically the signing of the "Farmington River Declaration" by 20 out of 22 registered political parties in Liberia in the presence of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government,

committing to violence-free elections in October and a peaceful transition to a new Government. Additionally, given the importance of a free and professional press to a democratic society, I am pleased by the commitment media managers have made to ensure inclusive and professional coverage of the electoral process.

77. Liberia made history by being the first country in Africa to democratically elect a female President, and the role of the women of Liberia in bringing peace through grass-roots activism has been well documented. Given the importance of women's leadership in sustaining peace, I call upon all political actors to demonstrate the transformational leadership required to overcome the legal, structural, cultural and other obstacles to women's political participation. Liberia's future also requires the development of a new generation of political leaders. I underscore in that regard the importance of including youth, who comprise the majority of the population, in the democratic process.

78. The National Elections Commission has demonstrated through numerous electoral processes its professionalism and impartiality, learning and applying lessons with each process. I stress the continued need for efforts aimed at ensuring transparency and a level playing field, which are essential for sustaining public confidence in the credibility of the electoral process. In that regard, I welcome the Commission's continued engagement with political parties through the Inter-Party Consultative Committee, and underscore the importance of this mechanism for dialogue and the resolution of contentious issues. I also note the important role of the newly established Office of the Ombudsman, the work of which should begin without further delay. While I recognize the constrained fiscal space, I urge the Legislature to prioritize the passage of the national budget and the Government to disburse funding expeditiously to the National Elections Commission.

79. Just beyond the electoral exercise will be a significant transition: the handover of power from President Johnson Sirleaf to a democratically elected successor in January 2018, which is unprecedented in the modern history of Liberia. The United Nations, working in close cooperation with the African Union, ECOWAS and other counterparts, will remain closely engaged in supporting that historic transition. I am pleased to note that preparations aimed at facilitating the preservation and transfer of government assets, information and documentation to the next Government is already under way. The success of this process will be of critical importance to the integrity of the democratic process and the stability of the incoming Government. I also wish to commend the Government of Liberia for its full engagement on the development of a peacebuilding plan, as requested by the Security Council, and call upon all international partners to generously support the implementation of this plan.

80. The people of Liberia have long recognized that sustaining the hard-won peace will require political, institutional and other reforms aimed at overcoming the societal and structural inequities that were at the root of the long conflict. While I recognize that some governance improvements are advancing, including the decentralization of public services, it is concerning that protracted delays continue to undermine efforts to advance deeper, and essential, structural reforms. In that regard, I call upon all legislators to prioritize the passage of proposed legislation that would have a positive impact on the lives and livelihoods of their constituents, in particular the pending land rights, local government and domestic violence bills, and to give attention to the constitutional amendments proposed by the Government.

81. Sustaining peace in Liberia will also require that real impetus be given to the essential process of national reconciliation, which has not gained adequate momentum since the issuance of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009. The people and Government of Liberia must demonstrate

courage by taking forward those important recommendations, including those aimed at addressing continued impunity for human rights abuses and violations committed during the civil war through criminal accountability. Priority must be given to restorative justice, truth and reconciliation.

82. It is concerning that efforts to root out the scourge of corruption have been ineffective, contributing to a dangerous cynicism that undermines trust and reconciliation. It is essential that all actors responsible for prosecuting and adjudicating corruption cases, particularly those involving prominent personalities, demonstrate through action that there will no longer be impunity for bribery, misappropriation of public funds, malfeasance and other corrupt acts.

83. I am very encouraged by the performance of the Liberian security services, which have proactively demonstrated their capacity to maintain stability and protect the population independently since the conclusion of the security transition from UNMIL in June 2016. Efforts under way to put in place a robust and well-coordinated electoral security plan aimed at responding effectively to any incident of public disorder are commendable and must be redoubled. I welcome the increasing focus of the Liberia National Police on effective community policing and crowd control throughout the electoral process, efforts that should be expanded. Additionally, police capacity should be reinforced in both strategic and tactical areas, particularly with regard to improving the managerial structure and command and control capacities. Building public trust, an essential aspect of maintaining public order, will require that effective mechanisms be in place to address any incident of indiscipline by security personnel entrusted with protecting the population. The credibility of the rule of law also requires greater attention to the courts and corrections system, including efforts to address the persistently high incidence of pretrial detention. I call upon the judiciary and all those concerned with the administration of justice to ensure that justice is administered effectively and in a fair and prompt manner.

84. I am concerned about the human rights situation in Liberia, especially continued impunity for sexual and gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices. I therefore welcome the recent launch of a dedicated hotline to report violence against children, and call upon the Government to provide the resources needed to ensure its sustainability. I also welcome the Liberia National Police hotline dedicated to reporting sexual and gender-based violence. It is essential that these tools contribute to the effective prosecution of perpetrators.

85. As UNMIL draws down, and with the closure of UNOCI on 30 June 2017 imminent, it is even more essential that the Liberian and Ivorian authorities coordinate closely to ensure stability along their shared border and to facilitate an environment conducive to the return of Ivorian refugees remaining in Liberia. Important cooperation mechanisms exist in the context of the Mano River Union. I call upon all Member States to demonstrate ownership and commitment by supporting the implementation of the joint cross-border security and confidence-building units.

86. Simultaneous with the important political period under way in Liberia, the United Nations engagement in the country is undergoing a major transformation, with UNMIL entering the final phase of its deployment. While the peacekeeping operation has been a constant and robust presence in the country for more than 13 years, it has never been the only partner on which Liberia could rely. I therefore welcome discussions under way aimed at reaffirming regional, bilateral, multilateral and other support for Liberia during these last months of the UNMIL deployment and beyond. While my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations country team will continue to accompany Liberia after the

withdrawal of UNMIL, I call upon donors to generously support efforts to fill identified gaps, including for the establishment of a stand-alone OHCHR office.

87. I would like to thank my Special Representative for Liberia, Farid Zarif, for his excellent and steadfast leadership. I also extend my sincere gratitude to all United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel, troop- and police-contributing countries, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Mano River Union and other regional organizations, multilateral and bilateral partners, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, non-governmental organizations and all other partners for their invaluable role in restoring peace to Liberia.

Annex

United Nations Mission in Liberia: military and police strength as at 1 June 2017

	Military component					
Country	*Military observers*	*Staff officers*	*Troops*	*Total*	*Formed police units*	*Police*
Bangladesh	–	–	–	–		
Benin	1	–	–	1		
Bhutan	–	–	–	–		
China	–	1	–	1	140	
Egypt	2	–	–	2		
Finland	–	–	–	–		
Gambia	1	–	–	1		
Germany	–	–	–	–		
Ghana	1	1	–	2		
India	–	–	–	–		
Kenya	–	–	–	–		
Nepal	1	–	–	1		
Nigeria	3	4	230	237	120	
Norway	–	–	–	–		
Pakistan	1	3	69	73		
Poland	–	–	–	–		
Republic of Korea	–	–	–	–		
Romania	–	–	–	–		
Russian Federation	1	–	–	1		
Senegal	–	1	–	1		
Serbia	1	–	–	1		
Sweden	–	–	–	–		
Togo	–	1	–	1		
Turkey	–	–	–	–		
Uganda	–	–	–	–		
Ukraine	1	2	105	108		
United States of America	–	2	–	2		
Zambia	1	–	–	1		
Total	**14**	**15**	**404**	**433**	**260**	

UNMIL
Deployment
June 2017
GUINEA
SIERRA LEONE
LIBERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
Monrovia
Robertsport
Bensonville
Kakata
Buchanan
Greenville
Harper
Zwedru (Tchien)
Fish Town
Barclayville
Sanniquellie
Voinjama
Ganta
Tapita
Zleh Town
Towns Town
Kanga
Hartford
Edina
Trade Town
Yepa Town
Timbo
Cestos City
Bolowhoin
Chayee
Gbarpu
Pennoken
Shabko
Jakakichn
Tiehnipo
Tuhake
Kopo
Baime
Nana Kru
Sinestown
Grand Cess
Pibo
Nemeke
Tabou
Kodeke
Nyanke
Ybuke (Kaobli)
Gbao
Duobo
Tawake
Bopolu
Tubmanburg
Mecca
Klay
Gbarnga
Sidida
Botota
Careysburg
Harbel
Marshall
FRG UNMIL
NIGERIA
UKRAINE
PAKISTAN
UNMO TEAM 2
UNPOL
FPU CHINA
FPU NIGERIA
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Department of Field Support
Geospatial Information Section (formerly Cartographic Section)